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Land and Freedom

Digger pamphlet by Gerrard Winstanley

A LETTER TO The Lord Fairfax, AND His Councell of War, WITH *Divers Questions to the Lawyers, and Ministers*: Proving it an undeniable Equity, That the common People ought to dig, plow, plant and dwell upon the Commons, with- out hiring them, or paying Rent to any.

*Delivered to the Generall and the chief Officers on Saturday June 9.*

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By *Jerrard Winstanly*, in the behalf of those who have begun to dig upon *George-Hill* in Surrey.

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*London*: Printed for *Giles Calvert*, at the black Spread-Eagle at the West end of  
P A U L S. 1 6 4 9.

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*To the Lord Fairfax, Generall of the English Forces, and his Councell of War.*

*SIR,*

Our digging and ploughing upon George-hill in Surrey is not unknown to you, since you have seen some of our persons, and heard us speak in defence thereof: and we did receive mildnesse and moderation from you and your Councell of Warre, both when some of us were at White-hall before you, and when you came in person to George-hill to view our works; we indeavour to lay open the bottome and intent of our businesse, as much as can be, that none may be troubled with doubtfull imaginations about us, but may be satisfied in the sincerity and universall righteousnessse of the work.

We understand, that our digging upon that Common, is the talk of the whole Land; some approving, some disowning, some are friends, filled with love, and sees the worke intends good to the Nation, the peace whereof is that which we seeke after; others are enemies filled with fury, and falsely report of us, that we have intent to fortifie our selves, and afterwards to fight against others, and take away their goods from them, which is a thing we abhor: and many other slanders we rejoyce over, because we know ourselves cleare, our endeavour being not otherwise, but to improve the Commons, and to cast off that oppression and outward bondage which the Creation groans under, as much as in us lies, and to lift up and preserve the purity thereof.

And the truth is, experience shews us, that in this work of Community in the earth, and in the fruits of the earth, is seen plainly a pitched battaile between the Lamb and the Dragon, between the Spirit of love, humility and righteousnessse, which is the Lamb appearing in flesh; and the power of envy, pride, and unrighteousnesse, which is the Dragon appearing in flesh, the latter power striving to hold the Creation under slavery, and to lock and hide the glory thereof from man: the former power labouring to deliver the Creation from slavery, to unfold the secrets of it to the Sons of Men, and so to manifest himselfe to be the great restorer of all things.

And these two powers strive in the heart of every single man, & make single men to strive in opposition one against the other, and these strivings will be till the Dragon be cast out, and his judgement and downfall hastens apace,

therefore let the righteous hearts wait with patience upon the Lord, to see what end he makes of all the confused hurley burleys of the world.

When you were at our Works upon the Hill, we told you, many of the Countrey-people that were offended at first, begin now to be moderate, and to see righteousness in our work, and to own it, excepting one or two covetous Free-holders, that would have all the Commons to themselves, and that would uphold the Norman Tyranny over us, which by the victorie that you have got over the Norman Successor, is plucked up by the roots, therefore ought to be cast away. And we expect, that these our angry neighbours, whom we never wronged, nor will not wrong, will in time see their furious rashnesse to be their folly, and become moderate, to speak and carry themselves like men rationafiy, and leave off pushing with their hornes like beasts: they shall have no cause to say wee wrong them, unlesse they count us wrongers of them for seeking a livelihood out of the common Land of England by our righteous labour, which is our freedome, as we are Englishmen equall with them, and rather our freedome then theirs, because they are elder brothers and Free-holders, and call the Inclosures their own land, and we are younger brothers, and the poore oppressed, and the Common Lands are called ours, by their owne confession.

We told you (upon a question you put to us) that we were not against any that would have Magistrates and Laws to govem, as the Nations of the world are governed, but as for our parts we shall need neither the one nor the other in that nature of Government; for as our Land is common, so our Cattell is to be common, and our corn and fruits of the earth common, and are not to be bought and sold among us, but to remaine a standing portion of livelihood to us and our children, without that cheating intanglement of buying and selhng, and we shall not arrest one another.

And then, what need have we of imprisoning, whipping, or hanging Laws, to bring one another into bondage? and we know that none of those that are subject to this righteous law dares arrest or inslave his brother for, or about the objects of the earth, because the earth is made by our Creator to be a common Treasury of livelihood to one equall with another, without resect of persons.

But now if you that are elder brothers, and that call the Inclosures your own land, hedging out others, if you will have Magistrates and Laws in this outward manner of the Nations, we are not against it, but freely without disturbance shall let you alone; and if any of we Commoners, or younger Brothers, shall steal your corne, or cattell, or pull down your hedges, let your laws take hold upon any of us that so offends.

But while we keep within the bounds of our Commons, and none of us shall be found guilty of meddling with your goods, or inclosed proprieties, unlesse the Spirit in you freely give it up, your laws then shall not reach to us, unlesse you will oppresse or shed the blood of the innocent: and yet our corn and cattell shall not be locked up, as though we would be proprietors in the middle of the Nation: no, no, we freely declare, that our corn and cattell, or what we have, shall be freely laid open, for the safety and preservation of the Nation, and we as younger brothers, living in love with you our elder brothers, for we shall endeavour to do, as we would be done unto; that is, to let every one enjoy the benefit of his Creation, to have food and rayment free by the labour of his hands from the earth.

And as for spirituall teachings, we leave every man to stand and fall to his own Master: if the power of covetousnesse be his Master or King that rules in his heart, let him stand and fall to him; if the power of love and righteousnesse be his Master or King that rules in his heart, let him stand and fall to him; let the bodies of men act love, humility, and righteousnesse one towards another, and let the Spirit of righteousnesse be the Teacher, Ruler and Judge both in us and over us; and by thus doing, we shall honor our Father, the Spirit that gave us our being. And we shall honor our Mother the earth, by labouring her in righteousnesse, and leaving her free from oppression and bondage.

We shall then honour the higher powers of the left hand man, which is our hearing, seeing, tasting, smelling, feeling, and walk in the light of reason and righteousnesse, that is, the King and Judge that sits upon this five cornered Throne, and we shall be strengthened by those five well springs of life, of the right hand man, which is, understanding, will, affections, joy and peace, and so live like men, in the light and power of the Son of righteousnesse within our selves feelingly. What need then have we of any outward, selfish, confused Laws made, to uphold the power of covetousnesse, when as we have the righteous Law written in our hearts, teaching us to walk purely in the Creation. Sir, The intent of our writing to you, is not to request your protection, though we have received an unchristian-like abuse from some of your souldiers; for truly we dare not cast off the Lord, and make choice of a man or men to rule us. For the Creation hath smarted deeply for such a thing, since Israel chose Saul to be their King; therefore we acknowledge before you in plain English, That we have chosen the Lord God Almighty to be our King and Protector.

Yet in regard you are our brethren (as an English Tribe) and for the present are owned to be the outward Governors, Protectors and Saviours of this Land, and whose hearts we question not, but that you endeavour to advance the same King of righteousnesse with us, therefore we are free to write to you, and to open the sincerity of our hearts freely to you, and to all the world.

And if after this report of ours, either you, or your Forces called souldiers, or any that owns your Laws of propriety, called freeholders, do abuse or kill our persons, we declare to you that we die, doing our duty to our Creator, by endeavouring from that power he hath put into our hearts to lift up his Creation out of bondage, and you and they shall be left without excuse in the day of Judgement, because you have been spoken to sufficiently.

And therefore our reason of writing to you is this, in regard some of your foot souldiers of the Ceneralls Regiment, under Captain Stravie that were quartered in our Town, we bearing part therein as well as our neighbours, giving them sufficient quarter, so that there was no complaining, did notwithstanding, go up to George-hill, where was onely one man and one boy of our company of the diggers. And at their first coming, divers of your souldiers, before any word of provocation was spoken to them, fell upon those two, beating the boy, and took away his coat off his back, and some linnen and victualls that they had, beating and wounding the man very dangerously, and fired our house.

Which we count a strange and Heathenish practise, that the souldierie should meddle with naked men, peaceable men, Countrymen, that meddled not with the souldiers businesse, nor offered any wrong to them in word or deed, uniesse, because we improve that victory which you have gotten in the name of

the Commons over King Charles, do offend the souldierie. In doing whereof, we rather expect protection from you then destruction. But for your own particular, we are assured of your moderation and friendship to us, who have ever been your friends in times of straits; and that you would not give Commission to strike us, or fire and pull down our houses, but you would prove us an enemy first.

Yet we do not write this, that you should lay any punishment upon them, for that we leave to your discretion, only we desire (in the request of brethren) that you would send forth admonition to your souldiers, not to abuse us hereafter; unlesse they have a Commission from you; and truly if our offences should prove so great, you shall not need to send souldiers for us, or to beat us, for we shall freely come to you upon a bare letter.

Therefore that the ignorant, covetous, free-holders, and such of your ignorant souldiers, that know not what freedom is, may not abuse those that are true friends to Englands freedom, and faithfull servants to the Creation, we desire, that our businesse may be taken notice of by you, and the highest Councell the Parliament, and if our work appear righteous to you, as it does to us, and wherein our souls have sweet peace, in the midst of scandalls and abuses;

Then in the request of brethren, we desire we may enjoy our freedom, according to the Law of contract between you and us, That we that are younger brothers, may live comfortably in the Land of our Nativity, with you the elder brothers, enjoying the benefit of our Creation, which is food and rayment freely by our labours; and that we may receive love, and the protection of brethren from you, seeing we have adventured estate and persons with you, to settle the Land in peace, and that we may not be abused by your Laws, nor by your souldiers, unlesse we break over into your inclosures as aforesaid, and take away your proprieties, before you are willing to deliver it up. And if this you do, we shall live in quietnesse, and the Nation will be brought into peace, while you that are the souldierie, are a wall of fire round about the Nation to keep a forraign enemy, and are succourers of your brethren that live within the Land, who indeavour to hold forth the Sun of righteousness in their actions, to the glory of our Creator.

And you and the Parliament hereby, will be faithfull in your Covenants, Oaths and promises to us, as we have been faithfull to you and them, in paying taxes, giving free-quarter, and affording other assistance in the publike work, whereby we that are the Common People, are brought almost to a morsell of bread, therefore we demand our bargain, which is freedome, with you in this Land of our Nativity.

But if you do sleight us and our cause, then know we shall not strive with sword and speare, but with spade and plow and such like instruments to make the barren and common Lands fruitful, and we have, and still shall, commit our selves and our cause unto our righteous King, whom we obey, even the Prince of peace to be our Protector; and unto whom you likewise professe much love, by your preaching, praying, fastings, and in whose name you have made all your Covenants, Oaths, and promises to us: I say unto him we appeal, who is and will be our righteous Judge, who never yet failed those that waited upon him, but ever did judge the cause of the oppressed righteously.

We desire that your Lawyers may consider these questions (which we affirm to be truths) and which gives good assurance by the Law of the Land, that we that

are the younger brothers or common people, have a true right to dig, plow up and dwell upon the Commons, as we have declared.

1. Whether William the Conqueror became not to be King of England by conquest, turned the English out of their birth-rights, burned divers townes, whereof thirty towns were bumed by him in Windsore Forrest; by reason whereof all sorts of people suffered, and compelled the conquered English for necessity of livelihood to be servants to him and his Norman souldiers?

2. Whether King Charles was not successor to the Crown of England from William the Conqueror, and whether all Laws that have been made in every Kings Reign, did not confirm and strengthen the power of the Norman Conquest, and so did, and does still hold the Commons of England under slavery to the Kingly power, his Gentry and Clergie?

3. Whether Lords of Mannours were not the successors of the Colonells and chief Officers of William the Conqueror, and held their Royalty to the Commons by Lease, Grant and Patentee from the King, and the power of the sword was and is the seale to their Title?

4. Whether Lords of Mannours have not lost their Royalty to the common land, since the common People of England, as well as some of the Gentry, have conquered King Charles, and recovered themselves from under the Norman Conquest?

5. Whether the Norman Conqueror took the land of England to himself, out of the hands of a few men, called a Parliament, or from the whole body of the English People? Surely he took freedom from every one, and became the disposer both of inclosures and commons; therefore every one, upon the recovery of the conquest, ought to return into freedom again without respecting persons, or els what benefit shall the common people have (that have suffered most in these wars) by the victory that is got over the King? It had been better for the common people there had been no such conquest; for they are impoverished in their estates by Free-quarter and Taxes, and made worse to live then they were before. But seeing they have paid Taxes, and given Free-quarter according to their estates, as much as the Gentry to theirs, it is both reason and equity that they should have the freedom of the land for their livelihood, which is the benefit of the commons, as the Gentry hath the benefit of their inclosures.

6. Whether the freedom which the common people have got, by casting out the Kingly power, lie not herein principally, to have the land of their nativity for their livelihood, freed from intanglement of Lords, Lords of Mannours, and Landlords, which are our task-masters. As when the enemy conquered England, he took the land for his own, and called that his freedom; even so, seeing all sorts of people have given assistance to recover England from under the Norman yoke, surely all sorts, both Gentry in their inclosures, Commonalty in their Commons, ought to have their freedom, not compelling one to work for wages for another.

7. Whether any Lawes since the coming in of Kings, have been made in the light of the righteous law of our creation, respecting all alike, or have not been grounded upon selfish principles, in feare or flattery of their King, to uphold freedom in the Gentry and Clergie, and to hold the common people under bondage still, and so respecting persons?

8. Whether all Lawes that are not groundd upon equity and reason, not giving a universal freedom to all, but respecting persons, ought not to be cut off with the Kings head? we affirm they ought. If all lawes be groundd upon equity and reason, then the whole land of England is to be a common treasury to every one that is born in the land: But if they be groundd upon selfish principles, giving freedom to some, laying burdens upon others, such lawes are to be cut off with the Kings head; or els the negiecters are Covenant, Oaths and Promise-breakers, and open hypocrites to the whole world.

9. Whether every one without exception, by the law of contract, ought not to have liberty to enjoy the earth for his livelihood, and to settle his dwelling in any part of the Commons of England, without buying or renting Land of any; seeing every one by Agreement and Covenant among themselves, have paid taxes, given free-quarter, and adventured their lives to recover England out of bondage? we affirm, they ought.

10. Whether the Laws that were made in the daies of the Kings, does give freedom to any other people, but to the gentry and Clergy, all the rest are left servants and bondmen to those task~masters; none have freedom by the Laws, but those two sorts of people, all the common people have been, and still are burdened under them.

And surely if the common people have no more freedom in England, but only to live among their elder brothers, and work for them for hire; what freedom then have they in England, more then we can have in Turkie or France? For there, if any man will work for wages, he may live among them, otherwise no: therefore consider, whether this be righteous, and for the peace of the Nation, that Laws shall be made to give freedom to impropiators and Free-holders, when as the poor that have no land, are left still in the straits of beggery, and are shut out of all livelihood, but what they shall pick out of sore bondage, by working for others, as Masters over them, and if this be not the burthen of the Norman yoke, let rationall men judge: therefore take not away men, but take away the power of tyranny and bad government, the price is in your hand, and let no part of the Nation be wronged for want of a Representative.

And here now we desire your publike Preachers, that say they preach the righteous law, to consider these questions, which confirms us in the peace of our hearts, that we that are the common people born in England, ought to improve the Commons, as we have declared, for a publike Treasury and livelihood, and that those that hinder us are rebelis to their Maker, and enemies to the Creation.

First, we demand I or No, whether the earth with her fruits, was made to be bought and sold from one to another? and whether one part of mankind was made a Lord of the land, and another part a servant, by the law of Creation before the fall?

I affirme, (and I challenge you to disprove) that the earth was made to be a common Treasury of livelihood for all, without respect of persons, and was not made to be bought and sold: And that mankind in all his branches, is the lord over the Beasts, Birds, Fishes, and the Earth, and was not made to acknowledge any of his owne kind to be his teacher and ruler, but the spirit of righteousness only his Maker, and to walk in his light, and so to live in peace, and this being a truth, as it is, then none ought to be Lords or Landlords over

another, but the earth is free for every son and daughter of mankind, to live free upon.

This question is not to be answered by any text of Scripture, or example since the fall, but the answer is to be given in the light of it self, which is the law of righteousness, or that Word of God that was in the beginning, which dwells in mans heart, and by which he was made, even the pure law of creation, unto which the creation is to be restored.

Before the fall, Adam, or the Man did dresse the garden, or the earth, in love, freedom, and righteousness, which was his rest and peace: But when covetousnesse began to rise up in him, to kill the power of love and freedom in him, and so made him (mankind) to set himself one man above another, as Cain lifted up himself above Abel, which was but the outward declaration of the two powers that strive in the man Adattis heart; and when he consented to that serpent covetousnesse, then he fell from righteousness, was cursed, and was sent into the earth to eat his bread in sorrow: And from that time began particular propriety to grow in one man over another; and the sword brought in propriety, and holds it up, which is no other but the power of angry covetousnesse: For, Cain killed Abel, because Abels principles, or religion, was contrary to his. And the power of the sword is still Cain killing Abel, lifting up one man still above another. But Abel shall not alwaies be slain, nor alwaies lie under the bondage of Cains cursed propriety, for he must rise: And that Abel of old was but a type of Christ, that is now rising up to restore all things from bondage.

2. I demand, whether all wars, blood-shed, and misery came not upon the Creation, when one man indeavoured to be a lord over another, and to claime propriety in the earth one above another? your Scripture will prove this sufficiently to be true. And whether this misery shall not remove (and not till then) when all the branches of mankind shall look upon themselves as one man, and upon the earth as a common Treasury to all, without respecting persons, every one acknowledging the law of righteousness in them and over them, and walking in his light purely? then cast away your buying and selling the earth, with her fruits, it is unrighteous, it lifts up one above another, it makes one man oppresse another, and is the burthen of the Creation.

3. Whether the work of restoration lies not in removing covetousnesse, casting that Serpent out of heaven, (mankind) and making man to live in the fight of righteousness, not in words only, as Preachers do, but in action, whereby the Creation shines in glory? I affirm it.

4. Whether is the King of righteousness a respecter of persons yea, or no? If you say no, then who makes this difference, that the elder brother shall be lord of the land, and the younger brother a slave and beggar? I affirm, it was and is covetousnesse, since the fall, not the King of righteousness before the fall, that made that difference; therefore if you will be Preachers, hold forth the law of righteousness purely, and not the confused law of covetousnesse, which is the murtherer: the law of righteousness would have every one to injoy the benefit of his creation, that is, to have food and rayment by his labour freely in the land of his nativity, but covetousnesse will have none to live free, but he that hath the strongest arme of flesh; all others must be servants.

5. Whether a man can have true peace by walking in the Law of covetousnesse and self, as generally all do, or by walking in the Law of universall

righteousnesse; doing as he would be done by? I affirm there is no true peace, till men talk lesse, and live more actually in the power of universall righteousness. Then you Preachers, lay aside your multitude of words, and your selfish doctrines, for you confound and delude the people.

6. Whether does the King of righteousness bid you love or hate your enemies, if you say love them, then I demand of you, why do some of you in your Pulpits, and elsewhere, stir up the people to beat, to imprison, put to death or banish, or not to buy and sell with those that endeavour to restore the earth to a common treasury again? surely at the worst, you can make them but your enemies; therefore love them, win them by love, do not hate them, they do not hate you.

7. Whether it be not a great breach of the Nationall Covenant, to give two sorts of people their freedom, that is, Gentry and Clergy, and deny it to the rest? I affirm it is a high breach, for mans Laws makes these two sorts of people, the Antichristian task-masters over the common people. The one forcing the people to give them rent for the earth, and to work for hire for them. The other which is the Clergy, that force a maintenance of tithes from the people; a practise which Christ, the Apostles and Prophets never walked in; therefore surely you are the false Christs, and false Prophets, that are risen up in these latter daies. Thus I have declared to you, and to all in the whole world, what that power of life is, that is in me. And knowing that the Spirit of righteousness does appear in many in this Land, I desire all of you seriously in love and humility, to consider of this businesse of publike community, which I am carried forth in the power of love, and clear light of universall righteousness, to advance as much as I can; and I can do no other, the Law of love in my heart does so constrain me, by reason whereof I am called fool, mad man, and have many slanderous reports cast upon me, and meet with much fury from some covetous people, under all which my spirit is made patient, & is guarded with joy and peace: I hate none, I love all, I delight to see every one live comfortably. I would have none live in poverty, straits or sorrows; therefore if you find any selfishnesse in this work, or discover any thing that is destructive to the whole Creation, that you would open your hearts as freely to me in declaring my weaknesse to me, as I have been open-hearted in declaring that which I find and feel much life and strength in. But if you see righteousness in it, and that it holds forth the strength of universall love to all without respect to persons, so that our Creator is honored in the work of his hand, then own it, and justifie it, and let the power of love have his freedom and glory.

Jerrard Winstanly.

The Reformation that England now is to endeavour, is not to remove the Norman Yoke only, and to bring us back to be governed by those Laws that were before William the Conqueror came in, as if that were the rule or mark we aime at: No, that is not it; but the Reformation is according to the Word of God, and that is the pure Law of righteousness before the fall, which made all things, unto which all things are to be restored: and he that endeavours not that, is a Covenant-breaker.

This Letter with the Questions were delivered by the Authors own hand to the Generall, and the chief Officers, and they very mildly promised they would read it, and consider of it.

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